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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

Maariv reported that Syria has been urging Israel, through Russia, to hold talks in Moscow. The newspaper cited The Washington Post as saying on Thursday that the U.S. and Russia have agreed to a

follow-up peace conference in early 2008 that would include Syria on the agenda. The newspaper added that President Bush warned Israel not to surprise the U.S. Maariv reported that Russian President Vladimir Putin insists that he is the only person who can influence Syrian President Bashar Assad. For its part, Ha'aretz quoted U.S. National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley as saying that it is difficult to see how Syria can fit into the renewed peace process. Hadley as said that Israel would be the one to decide whether to negotiate with Syria, but that Syria must first make fundamental changes in policy. Maariv said that U.S. and Israeli officials were satisfied with Syrian Deputy FM Faisal Mekdad's speech at Annapolis. Maariv reported that according to "incontrovertible" official Israeli land ownership records, in the 1930s French Baron Edmond de Rothschild bought 59,000 dunams (approximately 15,000 acres) of land in Syria -- 6.000 dunams of which are in the Israeli-occupied Golan. At the time of the establishment of Israel, the land was handed over to the Jewish National Fund.

All media reported that on Thursday police recommended that PM Ehud Olmert not be tried over his role in the privatization of Bank Leumi, citing a lack of evidence.

Ha'aretz reported that Attorney Talia Sasson, the author of a highly influential government report on illegal outposts in the West Bank, has warned the government against approving a new Justice Ministry proposal that would allow state funding for outposts. In her letter to the Ministerial Committee on Unauthorized Outposts -- a panel which was formed to implement her report on the subject -- Sasson says the proposal would constitute a "clear and immediate violation of the Prime Minister's prior commitments to the President of the U.S." Ha'aretz added that the measure, which would also allow the construction of previously approved projects, is expected to pass and be supported by Kadima members on the panel, including FM Livni and Vice Premier Ramon. The newspaper also reported that right-wing activists are planning to establish three new outposts over the next several days. They also intend to return to and rebuild previously evacuated outposts. The first activity is scheduled for December 12. The activists plan to establish outposts near Kochav Hashahar, Jerusalem and Beit El.

PM Olmert was quoted as saying in an interview with Yediot that he has not agreed yet to any concessions. He also defended U.S. arbitration as defined in the Roadmap. Israel Radio reported that the UN Security Council has endorsed the Annapolis conference in principle. The radio quoted Israel's Ambassador to the UN, Danny Gillerman, as saying that it is not certain whether the U.S. consulted Israel on this issue, as it usually does. On another matter, The Jerusalem Post reported that on Thursday Gillerman urged Hamas to stop "eternalizing the past": Hamas officials have called for the UN to rescind the partition plan that was adopted on November 29, 1947.

The Jerusalem Post reported that defense officials are unhappy with the appointment of Gen. (ret) James Jones as the new special envoy to coordinate security between Israel and the Palestinians. The newspaper quoted a senior defense official involved in talks with the Palestinians as saying that Jones was likely to spend most of his time pressuring Israel to make concessions. "Another envoy is not what is needed now," the official was quoted as saying: "Both sides know what needs to be done, the problem is that due to everything else that is going on - including Hamas's control over Gaza and the current coalition in Israel -- things are stuck."

Leading electronic media reported that today the High Court of Justice ordered the state to delay its reduction of power supplies to the Gaza Strip by at least two weeks, pending a full presentation detailing the proposed operation. Maariv quoted Likud Chairman Binyamin Netanyahu as saying on Thursday that PM Olmert will launch a military operation in Gaza to escape from the Winograd conclusions. The Jerusalem Post quoted a senior Fatah official in Gaza City as saying on Thursday that Fatah will fight alongside Hamas if and when the IDF launches a military operation in Gaza.

The Jerusalem Post quoted Usama bin Ladin as saying in an audiotape aired on Al Jazeera-TV on Thursday that Israeli "aggression" against Palestinians partially prompted Al-Qaida's 9/11 attacks.

Yediot reported that Hizbullah has the ability to target the entire

territory of Israel with recently delivered Fateh-220 Iranian-made missiles.

The media reported that Netanyahu and former FM Silvan Shalom reconciled on Thursday.

Yediot reported that the IAF has decided not to ground its old F15 planes, despite the fact that the USAF decided to do so for the second time this month.

Yediot and The Jerusalem Post reported that recently declassified Nixon papers from 1969 reveal that then National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger wrote President Nixon that Israel stole nuclear-related secrets from the U.S.

The Jerusalem Post reported that U.S. software giant Microsoft Corp. has entered into a cooperative training project with Israel expected to provide some 250,000 Israel women, youth, and disabled people with a springboard to a career in science and technology-related industries.

Maariv reported that oligarch Arkady Gaidamak might build a new compound for the Russian Embassy in Tel Aviv. Maariv said that the move is meant to strengthen Gaidamak's status in the Kremlin.

Yediot reported that on Sunday the cabinet will endorse the national plan to fight trafficking in persons.

Ha'aretz published the results of a poll conducted by Dialog on November 28:

The Annapolis conference was ...

A failure: 42%; Neither success, nor failure: 24%; A success: 17%; Undecided: 17%.

Did the summit increase chances for a permanent status agreement with the Palestinians by the end of 2008?

No: 62%; Yes: 24%; Undecided: 14%.

If it is possible to arrive at a permanent status agreement on the basis of two states for two peoples, which includes all "core issues," will you support it?

Yes: 53%; Prefer not to: 38%; Undecided: 9%.

On the assumption that 2008 will be the crucial year concerning Iran's nuclear issue, who would you trust to deal with the problem?

Olmert: 8%; Defense Minister Ehud Barak: 20%; FM Tzipi Livni: 6%;

Binyamin Netanyahu: 31%; Avigdor Lieberman: 13% Undecided: 22%.

What should Barak do when the final Winograd Report is published, in light of his past commitments?

Resign from the government and act to bring about early elections:

40%; Remain in the government, since circumstances have changed:

24%; Call for replacing Olmert: 17%; Undecided: 19%.

"Were elections held today, for whom would you vote for?"

(Results in Knesset seats -- in brackets, 2006 elections results.)

Likud 30 (12); Labor Party 23 (19); Kadima 15 (29); Yisrael Beiteinu

11 (11); Shas 9 (12); National Union-National Religious Party 6 (7);

United Torah Judaism 6 (7); Meretz 4 (6); Arkady Gaidamak's Social

Justice 4 (0); Arab parties 10 (10).

A Yediot poll sees Kadima gaining seats at Labor's expense.

Mideast:

Summary:

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn and Washington correspondent Shmuel Rosner wrote from Annapolis in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "President George W. Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice have chalked up an impressive achievement as their terms near an end.... This week's festivities probably strengthened [Bush's] idealistic side."

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: "An overall one-year schedule for a comprehensive solution is unfeasible and totally ridiculous. What will happen if it turns out that it is impossible to accomplish this task?"

Op-Ed Page Editor Ben-Dror Yemini wrote in Maariv: "It is worthwhile

to listen to [the Israeli Right's] fears.... [But] rejecting a two-state solution leads to a single-state alternative. It will be neither a binational nor a democratic state. It will be another Arab one."

Ha'aretz editorialized: "Annapolis will not lead Israel to any solution with the Palestinians unless Israel stops cheating and learns to restrain its expansion eastward."

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "The time to find out whether the Arab world is ready for a state beside Israel rather than in its stead is now, not at the end of the process."

Former ambassador to Egypt and Sweden, contributor Zvi Mazel wrote in the nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe: "[Annapolis] undoubtedly was an American success.... The question is whether the [joint] declaration is realistic."

Block Quotes:

I. "When All Is Said and Done"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn and Washington correspondent Shmuel Rosner wrote from Annapolis in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (11/30): "President George W. Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice have chalked up an impressive achievement as their terms near an end.... The speeches [at Annapolis] were positive and expressed hope, without going overboard. Will this result in a final-status agreement? After all the past disappointments, nobody is willing to bet on that..... There is Bush the 'idealist' and Bush the 'realist,' as one of his acquaintances put it. Sometimes one prevails, sometimes the other. Most of the time they simply coexist. Sometimes Bush believes that he will succeed in bringing the Palestinians to water and make them drink, too. At other moments he views the Middle East with cruel sobriety and assumes that he will leave the Palestinian problem to the next president. This week's festivities probably strengthened his idealistic side. The Annapolis conference placed Olmert at the center of the international stage for the first time. As he sees it, all the attending leaders and foreign ministers came to listen to him and Abu Mazen."

II. "Signs of Oil"

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (11/30): "Olmert was not lying when he delivered his lofty speech and talked about painful compromises, the Palestinians' suffering, and the need for peace. When he reached the part where he declared that 'now is the time' and 'we are willing,' he was ignoring the genuine reality. The trouble is that this drama is dangerous, that it creates illusions, and could crash [Annapolis'] participants. An overall one-year schedule for a comprehensive solution is unfeasible and totally ridiculous. What will happen if it turns out that it is impossible to accomplish this task? In the meantime, America will enter the election period, the Palestinians will again despair, and the ceiling will fall yet another time? What will this do to Abu Mazen, to the two-state idea, to the axis of the moderates, to Israel's status, and to the region?"

III. "The Rejectionist Front"

Op-Ed Page Editor Ben-Dror Yemini wrote in Maariv (11/30): "The [Israeli] Right fears that the Annapolis show, and especially what is expected to follow, will lead to a Palestinian state. It is worthwhile to listen to those fears: A Palestinian state will turn into a Hamas one, an extension of Iran and Hizbullah, and lead to a permanent threat of shells and Katyusha rockets on Israel's population centers and Ben-Gurion Airport.... But it is not the Right that created Arab rejection of the Partition plan; the Right is not responsible for the three 'noes' at Khartoum in 1967; the Right did not cause Arafat to say 'no' to the Clinton outline. We have had too many illusions since Oslo, too many times have we found out that our goodwill meets a totally different resolve on the other side. But there is one problem: rejecting a two-state solution leads to a single-state alternative. It will be neither a binational nor a democratic state. It will be another Arab one."

IV. "A Halt, not a Suspension"

Ha'aretz editorialized (11/30): "When Ehud Olmert warns that the world could impose a 'South African solution' on Israel if two states are not created, side by side, he is tacitly admitting that expansion of the settlements is making Israel look increasingly like an apartheid regime. The agreement to withdraw, or to make 'painful concessions,' as it is sanctimoniously called, is therefore less painful than any other alternative. The only question is whether another Yitzhak Rabin can be found, who is capable of really halting, not just suspending, the construction of settlements, to leave the Palestinians some territory in which to establish Palestine.... In April 2004 the government promised the Americans that there would be no more construction 'beyond the outside line' of each settlement. That outside line has never been set. Annapolis will not lead Israel to any solution with the Palestinians unless Israel stops cheating and learns to restrain its expansion eastward."

IV. "Partition at 60"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (11/30): "The juxtaposition of the anniversary of the passage of the UN General Assembly's partition plan and this week's Annapolis conference is a telling one. The Arab world marks November 29, 1947, as a day of 'catastrophe.' Sixty years later, the challenge for peacemakers remains what it was then: obtaining Arab acceptance for partition.... What the run-up to Annapolis, and the glaring omission of the words 'Jewish state' from the joint statement sadly underlined, however, is that [the] Arab 'recognition' [of Israel] has always come with a huge asterisk attached to it. The Arab position has been, in essence, 'We recognize you, but we have every right to make demands that entirely negate that recognition'.... Without real mutual recognition, two states will only bring more war, not peace. The time to find out whether the Arab world is ready for a state beside Israel rather than in its stead is now, not at the end of the process."

VI. "A Gesture to the United States, No More"

Former ambassador to Egypt and Sweden, contributor Zvi Mazel wrote in the nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe (11/30): "[Annapolis] undoubtedly was an American success, which showed that despite the grave problems faced by the Bush administration, the U.S. is still capable of leading the international community. It looks as if the many participants came mostly because of the U.S. invitation.... Some said that the size of the conference was fit for the signing of a peace treaty, not for its launching.... The question is whether the [joint] declaration is realistic. We must especially ask this given the sorry state of the Palestinian Authority, which is not only unable to restrain terrorist organizations after losing Gaza but also in which powerful political and public forces representing a broad segment of Palestinian society are unwilling to negotiate."

JONES